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LETTERS

TO THE



REV. PROFESSOR STUART,

COMPRISING

REMARKS ON HIS ESSAY ON SIN,

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LETTER I.

INTRODUCTION.—THE POINT IN DEBATE EXPLICITLY STATED.—

PLAN OF DISCUSSION.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

I have perused and re-perused, with much care, your Essay on Sin, in both its parts ; together with the letter of explanation with which you have favored me. I now sit down, agreeably to my promise, to offer some comments. To this task I come with unaffected reluctance. To find myself in conflict with a beloved and honored Professor in that sacred Seminary with which, from the first, I have held a responsible connection ; and this, too, on points which, on all reflection, I cannot but view as fundamental and vital, gives me more pain than I can possibly describe. Nothing, let me aver, but the interests of sacred truth, and the imperious demands of apprehended duty, could possibly reconcile me to such a position.

I begin by repeating my thanks for your kind and candid reception of my first letter, plain and unceremonious as it was. This kindness of yours combines with a thousand other considerations, to inculcate a similar spirit on myself. Indeed, every feeling of my heart recoils from the thought of unkindness to a

Christian brother, long loved and valued; while fidelity to the truth bids me treat his statements and reasonings with the utmost freedom.

The object of your Essay seems to be, to disprove and explode the doctrine of *original sin*, or of *native depravity*; taking these terms in their ordinarily received, and well understood sense. It is true, that you occasionally employ expressions which, taken by themselves, might be viewed as not materially exceptionable, by the friends of the doctrine in question. But I appreciate too highly your independence and integrity, to suspect that you intend to be equivocal. There is an affluence in the English language which supplies appropriate terms for all our ideas; and of this affluence you are amply possessed. When you intimate an opinion that the whole debate may be resolved into a difference in *terminology*, I can only express my surprise; or rather I can only avow a surprise which it is out of my power to express.

If, in the remarks which I shall offer on your theory, I shall make it appear that the philosophic principle on which it is built, is erroneous—that the celebrated author whose support it claims, gives it no support at all—that the theory itself is in conflict with the scriptures—that it is inconsistent with your own repeated admissions and statements—and finally, that it stands opposed to your publicly avowed opinions; you will doubtless admit that it should be abandoned. On the points thus indicated, I will venture no confident promises. All I ask is, to be favored, in this discussion, with the candid attention, and the critical scrutiny, of yourself, and of my readers at large.

LETTER II.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE THEORY IN QUESTION.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

Your denial of the doctrine of original sin is based on the apprehended fact, that *all sin consists in voluntary transgression of known law, and in nothing else*; in a word, that properly speaking, *there is no other sin beside actual sin*. Thus you

would seem to exclude *propensities, dispositions, habits*, from the possession of any moral character whatever.

Here I observe that your error, if it is an error, is, in strictness of speech, philosophic, rather than theological. And this circumstance gives me leave to remark on the infinite danger of introducing into religious subjects, philosophic principles which are in the least degree doubtful. Here, for instance, is a very simple, and, as some would think, a very innocent maxim; that *all sin consists in action*. And yet this maxim, so simple and so innocent, is made a lever by which to overturn a great doctrine of the gospel which the Christian church has, from the first, regarded as not only unquestionable in its evidence, but as lying at the foundation of the whole system of religion, theoretic and practical.

Permit me another remark. When we undertake to philosophize in religion, the utmost caution is needful. Shall we assume a philosophical dogma, and make the scripture bend to it? Or shall we not rather take our stand by the sacred oracle, and modestly consent that all our preconceived philosophical notions shall bow and fall before it? In other words, shall we confidently determine for ourselves what the Bible *ought* to say; or shall we humbly inquire what it has actually said?

Excuse me, my dear Sir, in declaring my apprehension, that to an error in this very point, are to be traced the perplexities and disputes which have recently infested the church on the subject of *original sin*. The doctrine, it is assumed by its opposers, is at war with the *philosophy of the human mind*. It cannot therefore be found in the Bible; and whoever undertakes to defend it, must do it at the expense of his reputation for scholarship and philosophy. It is but too true, that the church does not abound with those heroic spirits that can encounter a peril like this.

I readily, indeed, admit that if you can satisfactorily establish the theory, that *all sin consists in action*, you effectually subvert the doctrine of original or native depravity. And from this fact, I infer with confidence, that the theory is untenable and false, since the doctrine is found in the Bible; intimately wrought into its whole system, and constantly meeting us on its very face.

But I will not stop here. I unhesitatingly join issue with you on the philosophic point in question, and will give it a momentary discussion.

And here let me inquire: In estimating the characters of men, do we regard their actions merely; or do we search for some-

thing beyond—their dispositions, their propensities, their habits, their *governing principles* of action? Unquestionably the last. Actions are of no farther importance than as they indicate and determine the principles from which they spring. It is *principles*, then, and not *actions*, which give the decisive stamp of character.

Will you say, that these principles belong to the class of voluntary action? In this case, you touch the very core of the difficulty, and furnish the means of its solution. No one will contend that pride and humility, that generosity and meanness, that benevolence and selfishness, are *actions*. They are *principles* of action. And to prove that this is their distinctive and simple character, it is needful only to remark that they exist and remain, when the action to which they naturally give birth, is entirely suspended. The generous man cannot always be performing generous actions. But he is not the less a generous man still. Surely, my dear Sir, you will not contend that the Christian ceases to be a Christian, whenever the *exercise* of grace is suspended. No. The principle of grace remains. It is enduring and imperishable. And what is the inference? Neither holiness nor sin consists exclusively in action.

While discussing the philosophy of your scheme, I must advert to another point. In explaining the actual sinfulness of human beings, you trace it to certain native *susceptibilities*; a term which you abundantly employ, and which I cannot but wish you had explained. Concerning these susceptibilities you declare that they are *adapted to lead and excite us to sin*, (p. 52.) You even declare that they *certainly lead to sin, and only to sin*, (p. 44.) Yet these susceptibilities, you strenuously contend, are *innocent—altogether innocent*. Here, your common-sense readers are much perplexed, and ask to be enlightened. 'That a *disposition to commit sin* is a *sinful disposition*, they perfectly understand. They were taught it in the nursery. The lesson they can never forget, nor renounce. But how susceptibilities altogether *innocent* should *tend to sin*, and even *certainly lead to it*, puzzles them extremely. Yet this is the vital principle, the grand support, of your theory. Take it away, and the whole fabric falls at once. I am constrained to add, that while it remains, it will press on your system, like an *incubus*, fatal to its energies, and ultimately fatal to its existence.

LETTER III.

VITRINGA.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

You have introduced into your Essay, several passages translated from Vitringa ; and this mainly, it should seem, for the purpose of proving that all sin consists in action. Will you excuse me in remarking that the passages introduced afford your theory not the shadow of support ; and that on the principal point attempted to be proved, your favorite author abandons ; and even contradicts you ? Vitringa recognizes and ratifies the distinction between the *habit* of sin, which he denominates *vitium*, and the *act*, which he styles *peccatum*. And he expressly declares that “*habitual* sin, in the order of nature and time, *precedes* sin in the *action*.” On these views of Vitringa, you remark that his “*vitium* appears to be nothing more nor less than the frequently repeated, i. e. habitual desire to sin, which leads to the commission of what he calls *sinful acts*.” You afterward declare that “nothing will be found plainer or more certain, than that his *vitium* is as really a transgression of the divine law (and of course an *act* of the mind) as his *peccatum*.”

How then stands the case ? You quote a writer as of high and commanding authority, to prove a favorite point. Having quoted, you *contradict* him, as not understanding the meaning of his own terms. And in virtue of this contradiction, you claim his support in behalf of the very theory which he rejects ! I feel myself, then, not only warranted, but constrained to add, that the statement of Vitringa, far from proving that all sin consists in action, proves directly the reverse. Indeed, he asserts, in so many words, and this, in the very face of your theory, that “all sin is *not act*. Neglect of duty is sin.” Such being literally the state of facts, I cannot help imagining that I see the venerable Dutchman smile (not to say *frown*) at your attempt to enlist him in such a cause.

I have not Vitringa at hand ; and I sincerely regret that I have not. Yet I cannot withhold one additional remark. Should any inference be drawn from your quotations and comments, that this celebrated author espouses and defends the modern

theory which denies *original sin*, it would, I strongly apprehend, be a most unjust inference ; wounding to his high reputation, and injurious to the cause of truth and piety. You do not yourself intimate that in the passages quoted, he had any immediate reference to the case of infants. Is it not altogether probable that he had principal reference to the case of adults ; and that in discussing the nature of sin, he uttered, as the most accurate writers are apt to do, in a similar case, some things which belong exclusively to adults, and do not touch the case of infants ? Even the Saviour, in his final charge to his Apostles, relative to their preaching of the gospel, declares, *He that believeth shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned*. The declaration may seem, at first view, to embrace the whole human family. But on a moment's reflection, we perceive that it refers exclusively to adults, and can have no reference to infants, who surely are not debarred from salvation by their incapacity to exercise faith.

Permit me, on this point, to appeal to one authority more—an authority of no little weight ; I mean your own. In the second part of your Essay, you explicitly state that in certain cases, *disposition, bias, inclination, propensity*, may be properly spoken of as *sinful*, and as *themselves sinful*. True, you admit this, only where they have been strengthened or augmented by voluntary sinful indulgence. Still, your statement proves, at least, that there are some cases in which propensities, dispositions, &c. are truly and properly sinful. And what more than this is needful to prove that your favorite maxim, that *all sin consists in action*, is a sheer mistake ; and that the theory you have built upon it, is founded in error ?

LETTER IV.

THE THEORY COMPARED WITH SCRIPTURE.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

Let us now repair to the HEAVENLY ORACLE. Let us consult that SUPREME AND INFALLIBLE JUDGE whose decisions alone can give satisfaction to the mind in a case at once so momen-

tous and perplexing. Unquestionably, if the point is ever to be ultimately settled, we shall be indebted for the consummation, not to human ingenuity and argument, but to a meek, humble, implicit submission to the word of God.

And here, suffer me to remark ; if the theory which denies infant or native depravity, is found in the Bible, it is, as it regards the Church, a discovery of very recent date. You will find it difficult to deny that the Church, as a body, has, from the first, maintained the opposite doctrine. And can it be, that on a fundamental point of our religion, the mind of God has remained latent and undiscovered, till the nineteenth century ? Has the Oracle uttered no response till now ? Has a grand and vital truth of Inspiration eluded the researches of the greatest and the best of former times, and revealed itself to the piety, the learning and the profound investigation of our own time ? *Credat Judæus Apella.* You, my dear Sir, will not readily believe it. And certainly I shall not.

I will ask your attention to a few passages of Scripture. If these shall be found to speak a language altogether precise and unequivocal, as I trust they will, these few will be as decisive on the point, as a thousand. Several of the passages in question you have yourself introduced, with comments designed to show their incompetency to prove that children are chargeable with actual transgression from their birth. But I must request you to consider them with care in another light ; I mean in their bearing on the doctrine of a proper *native depravity*, as it regards the whole human race.

In Gen. 5. 1. it is declared, "In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him." In a verse almost immediately succeeding, it is added, "Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image." The contrast is equally simple, obvious, and affecting. How could words more significantly declare that the son of the fallen Adam was the opposite, in character and disposition, to the *un-fallen* father ? And is it not equally clear that he received this depraved character by inheritance, by birth ? Here, too, a question arises, which looks to you for a solution. How do these strong and unbending expressions comport with your soft and pliant theory of a mere difference in the *proportion of susceptibilities* in regard to sinful excitement, as possessed by innocent Adam, and by his posterity ? Does not the contrast instituted between these classes of susceptibilities, or rather of dispositions and propensities, obviously

respect their very *nature*, and not merely their degree and proportion? Yet this is the very thing which you strenuously deny.

I shall not view it as *un-critical* (borrowing your own expression) to resort, in the next place, to Job 15. 14; especially as the quotation to be introduced is in perfect keeping with the uniform language of Scripture. "What is man, that he should be clean; and he that is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?" This passage gives us to understand that every individual of the human family, without exception, is born in a state of moral depravity. It does more, indeed than make the assertion in direct terms. It takes the fact for granted. It implies that it is not only true, but self-evident and undeniable. It implies that the contrary doctrine is not only false, but grossly and palpably absurd. It implies that every human being is originally impure in a moral sense; that every individual born of woman is, by nature unholy and depraved.

My next quotation is from Psalm 51. 5. "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." This acknowledgment of David was uttered in the view of gross actual transgressions of the divine law. And his meaning and design are perfectly obvious. He traces the bitter streams of evil to the more bitter and overflowing fountain of a corrupt heart. Far from pleading, as some have done, his inbred corruption as an excuse for his actual sin, he recurs to it as an aggravation. The consciousness of this corruption, he seems to say, should have rendered him more watchful against temptation, more guarded against every approach to actual transgression. And what is the doctrine which every unsophisticated reader perceives on the very face of this remarkable passage? It is simply this; that the royal suppliant commenced his existence in a state of moral depravity; that the first moment he became a human being, he became a sinful being; that in this respect, he was a sample of the race; and that of course, every individual of the human family commences existence in the same moral condition.

Let us now turn to the New Testament, and listen to the divine Teacher, while he declares to Nicodemus (John 3. 6.) "'That which is born of the flesh is flesh.'" This assertion immediately follows his assertion of the necessity of regeneration. To those acquainted with the use of the term *flesh*, in the New Testament, there is one construction of the passage, and one only,

which appears unforced and natural. It is this; That which proceeds from depraved and sinful parents, is, like themselves, sinful and depraved. No other sense forms a proper and intelligible antithesis between the former and latter clauses of the verse. In this view, it appears that the Saviour builds on the native depravity of human beings, the necessity of their regeneration. And reason itself declares aloud, that if human beings are naturally sinful and corrupt, they must be renewed and sanctified, in order to enter a holy heaven. You repeatedly admit, my dear Sir, the absolute necessity of regeneration, even as it regards those who die in infancy. But do you not, by denying their proper depravity, virtually deny the necessity of their regeneration. For to what purpose is the verbal admission of a doctrine, if the fact on which it rests, the fact on which our divine Teacher rests it, is denied, and its foundation of course, entirely removed?

Let us attend, for a moment, to that remarkable and appalling declaration of the Apostle to the Ephesians, in the second chapter of his Epistle: "And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." Your remark on this passage is worthy of notice. You are anxious to have it considered as designating simply the natural and unregenerate state of man, in distinction from a regenerate state. Thus you would deprive it of all direct reference to the time when, and the manner in which, sin commences or exists. Suppose this point to be yielded; and how will your cause be served by it? Suppose the Apostle to predicate the wrath of God upon a state of *unregeneracy*. Is not *depravity* likewise necessarily *implied* in the case? Can there be wrath where there is no sin? Will a God of infinite benevolence denounce his anger on beings, the work of his hands, on account of their *innocent susceptibilities*? Will he punish their *future* sins with *present* vengeance?—Alas, your scheme, while it promises us light, pours the horrors of an Egyptian darkness upon the whole scene.

Finally, on this point, let us recur to Romans 5. 12—19. This is a passage of unspeakable interest. Were it expunged from the Book of God, the information it gives would be fully supplied in no other part. It pours a flood of light on the topic of our native depravity and guilt. It asserts both the one and the other, in terms absolutely impossible to be evaded. True, you declare that the exhibition, considered in this light, comes quite too late; since the Apostle, in the three first chapters of the

epistle, had completed and closed his proof of the guilt, both of Jews and Gentiles. Really, my dear Sir, I cannot but regret these remarks. They are a specimen of *a priori* reasoning altogether peculiar. That the proof of human depravity and guilt, exhibited in the chapters named, was most luminous and convincing, I readily confess. But that the subject admitted no farther illustration, is a discovery entirely your own. Should we not, in candor and deference to the Apostle, submit the whole matter to his own judgment, and consent to receive any additional illustration in his own time, and his own way? Indeed, is it not perfectly natural, that when the Apostle proceeds, as he does in the last part of this chapter, to unfold the analogy between our *ruin* and our *recovery*, we should perceive light reflected by the latter on the former, which could arise from no other source? And this is literally and undeniably the fact.

Suffer me to fasten your attention, for a moment, on the 12th verse. "Wherefore, as by one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." In the last sentence of this verse, as connected with what precedes, you perceive two things most unequivocally asserted; first, that sin and death in the human family, are alike universal. Secondly, that death is the fruit or consequence of sin. Now consider, if you please, this inspired assertion in its application to infants. In every age, infants die by millions;* and as death is the fruit of sin, their death is either the *punishment* and *proof* of their personal depravity, or God visits on them the penalty incurred by their first progenitor. This is the precise dilemma which meets you. And is not either aspect of it fatal to your system?

I have not time to multiply remarks; nor is it needful. I will simply recite the 18th and 19th verses. "Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous." Are we not here taught, and unequivocally taught, that the sin of Adam involved the whole race in condemnation; that by his disobedience, the whole human family are constituted sinners, and treated as such?

* I have no objection at all to that larger view of the *death* intended in this verse, which you have given in your Commentary on Romans. It is sufficient to the purpose of my argument, that temporal death is included; and this you of course admit.

In other words, are we not taught that God dealt with the first parent, not as a mere insulated individual, but a public person; the head and representative of all his unborn offspring; by whose obedience or disobedience, in one grand instance, their character and their destiny were to be determined?

But this, you will say, perhaps, is neither more nor less than *imputation*; and from every approach to this doctrine, you shrink with horror. For myself, I have no apprehension that the *fate of the church* depends on the retention or abandonment of a *word*. But suffer me to ask; Is not the question, in this case, in reality a question of fact? Has the Most High actually treated the human family in accordance with the conduct of their first parent? Do they endure substantially the same consequences, as if they had personally participated in his original transgression? And does all this take place according to the divine plan? Does it comport with the arrangement made by the God of heaven with the great father of the human family? If all these questions must be answered in the affirmative—and I can see no room for hesitation here—the controversy which has so long agitated the church on the subject of *imputation*, may cease and determine. Its friends ask nothing but the admission of the few simple facts which have been stated. And its enemies cannot easily deny them.

Let me not be understood as defending the doctrine that human beings are subjected to eternal suffering, or indeed to any suffering, as *innocent*, and irrespectively of their personal sin. From the commencement of their being, they are personally depraved and sinful, and, in this view, obnoxious to the displeasure of God, and all its dreadful consequences. Indeed, how can the fact that they commence their existence in this state, be explained, but on the principle of a constituted connection with their apostate parent! Would a just and benevolent God inflict so tremendous an evil for no cause, or as matter of pure sovereignty?

Nor is it any part of the doctrine, arising from the scriptural passages last quoted, that human beings, dying in infancy, are necessarily lost. The conclusions they naturally suggest, seem to be directly the reverse. Infants, without consciousness, and without personal transgression, partake in the deleterious effects of the apostasy. And may they not, without consciousness, and without the actual exercise of faith, partake in the redemption and salvation of Christ? We believe they do. It is natural to entertain the delightful thought, that *all* who die in infancy are,

through that grace of Heaven which abounds and super-abounds—washed, sanctified and everlastingly saved. Yes, the thought is *natural*, as well as delightful. Nothing in Scripture stands plainly opposed to it. While, at the same time, as the fact is not plainly revealed, we should speak on the subject with that diffidence which becomes us on every subject where the mind of God is not distinctly and decisively declared.

You are now in possession of my grand objection to your scheme. Unless I grossly mistake, it is at war with the Bible ; with its spirit, and its letter ; with its general design and tenor, and with particular passages almost innumerable ; for the passages briefly discussed are but a mere specimen of what the Bible contains. It is a sufficient objection against any religious theory, if it fails to find support in Scripture. What then shall we say, if it brings us into direct and constant collision with it ; if it can be maintained only by putting the Bible to a species of torture?—You are a Christian and a philologist. And you will pardon me in saying, that the process by which your pure and accurate mind has been brought to its present views of a multitude of inspired passages, is to me perfectly inexplicable.

I have, indeed, admitted, and with pleasure I repeat the admission, that your Essay contains many passages on the subject of native depravity, which are not materially exceptionable ; by which I mean, that they are not obvious departures from Scripture doctrine. That I may be sure of doing you full justice on this important point, I will group together, in a single view, several of the most remarkable expressions to which I allude. In page 27, you speak of “our nature, since the fall of Adam,” as “degenerate and prone to sin.” You declare (p. 43,) that “the dominant susceptibilities of infants are those which lead to sin.” In p. 45, you speak of “the predominant tendency of the susceptibilities of infants born since the fall,” as “*reversed*, and so much reversed, that as soon as they come to moral agency, the doing of evil will always take place, in regard to every moral action.” In p. 48, you state that “the susceptibility of impression from sinful objects is innate, connate, original,” &c. and “will develope itself in persuading and influencing men—all men—to sin.” In p. 49, you declare your belief that “Adam, by his transgression, made or constituted all men sinners.” In the same page, you emphatically claim to be “a believer in the native, original depravity of man, in the only sense in which this is an intelligible proposition.” Now, my dear Sir, whatever I

may think of the *philosophy* involved in some of these forms of expression, I should cordially rejoice to give them credit for substantial *orthodoxy*. But from this gratification you have yourself entirely precluded me. If you ask me, *how* ; I reply at once, that you have effectually *neutralized*, not to say, *retracted* and *reversed*, the statements which I have recited above, and which wear so imposing an appearance of orthodoxy. You assert that those very susceptibilities which in fallen man, are so pregnant of evil, existed substantially in Adam while innocent, and in the fallen angels, while in their originally pure and holy state. You even declare (though my pen almost refuses to record the declaration) that “the Lord Jesus Christ himself had a susceptibility of feeling the power of enticement to sin ; like that which Adam had before his fall.” The only difference, in the two cases, consists, as you assert, in the different degree, proportion and predominance of susceptibilities. Hence you reason in this style : “That which Adam possessed, as a constituent of his very nature before his fall ; that which the Saviour himself possessed when he was *tempted in all points as we are*, should not be called sin.” And again ; “That thing in the Saviour and in Adam, which was *not* sin, when existing in one degree, is not sin, when existing in ten degrees or more, at the present day, in all our race, while in their native state or condition.”—So then we are brought to the conclusion that those innate susceptibilities which so invariably lead to sin ; and even that native, original depravity in which you so firmly believe, are in themselves *innocent—perfectly innocent*. If this reasoning does not confute itself, we may at least pause and inquire : Does the Scripture account of man’s apostasy permit us to consider it as consisting in his susceptibilities of good impressions being *paucified*, and his susceptibilities of evil impressions being multiplied ? Does the account it gives of regeneration represent it as a turning of the balance, or reversing of the weights in the respective scales ? If this last is the case, we must be content to remain sadly ignorant of what is meant by a *renovation*, by a *new creation*, by *being born again*, by *passing from death to life*. True, these expressions are metaphorical. But are they metaphors without meaning ? Are they designed to pour darkness, and not light, on the subject ? Are they intended to perplex and bewilder the mind, instead of guiding it ?

LETTER V.

THE THEORY CHARGED WITH SOME MATERIAL ERRORS.—THE TERM
SUSCEPTIBILITY EQUIVOCAL AND PERPLEXING.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

If your theory, as I think I have shown, shrinks from some of the most natural tests to which it can be brought, is there not reason to apprehend that it embraces some latent defects ; some vital, pervading errors ? I verily believe it does.

Will you then indulge me your candor, while I advert to a few points which appear to me to be *unsound spots—fundamental errors* in your system ?

First. While in the introductory part of your Essay, you seem to pay deference to the *law of God*, as the grand test of character, and the only standard of duty, you seem, in your subsequent remarks, to express views materially different. You freely admit that there are such things as dispositions, inclinations, propensities in men. Doubtless too you will admit that the law of God, while it requires of human beings, holy volition and action, equally requires that their dispositions, inclinations and propensities be holy. Nor will you deny that this law is, like its Author, unchangeable and eternal. What it required yesterday, it requires to day, and will require forever. What it required of Adam in paradise, it equally requires of all his posterity, sinful and utterly depraved as they are. Have you, my dear Sir, kept this constantly in mind ? Or does the whole course of your reasoning, in its bearing upon human beings, go to prove that they are under no obligation to be entirely holy from their first existence, and are chargeable with no guilt on account of their unholiness ? In other words, does it go to prove that human apostasy, human depravity, have *repealed* the law of God ?—It has been, with some great divines, an axiom, that nearly all the errors which have been broached in religion, may be traced to erroneous or defective views of the law. Is it not at least possible that an error of this kind may lie at the foundation of your system ? If so, may it not vitiate the whole superstructure ?

Farther ; you seem to acknowledge nothing as properly sinful, which does not partake of the nature of positive transgression.

This I infer from your general train of reasoning, and from a particular passage, (p. 293) in which you declare that "omission always amounts to the doing of something which God has forbidden, under present circumstances, instead of doing one's duty." You add, with emphasis, "The acts, the voluntary acts of men, are those things for which they are either rewarded or punished." But may you not be in error here? Doubtless you are well acquainted with that definition which the venerable divines of Westminster give of sin, and which makes it consist in *want of conformity* to God's law, as well as in positive transgression. And is not this the verdict of reason and common sense? How shall we fix the charge of guilt, of constantly accumulating guilt, on thousands and millions of the race, who live in the habitual performance, at least of the externals of moral and social duty, and whose lives are stained by no vice, or crime, but by shewing them their grand, vital defect—the want of love; that love to God which his law requires first of all; that love which should have constituted the animating soul of all their external performances? And how shall we evince the depravity of the youngest of the race, but by showing that naturally they have no love to God, and no particle of disposition or inclination to love him? Here is the grand defect; and here the grand evidence of their depravity. But if the fact be overlooked or denied, or the *evil* of it be overlooked or denied, their depravity is overlooked and denied of course.

Again; your theory maintains the doctrine that human beings may exist *without any character at all*. Infants, you contend, are *innocent*; but innocence, you declare, does not qualify them for heaven. Something positive must be done for them. They must be regenerated; they must be rendered positively holy, or they cannot enter heaven. And can these things be so? Do there exist on earth, or indeed in any region of the universe, rational, moral beings, who have no moral character? Are there found members of the human family, who are neither pure nor impure, neither holy nor unholy? What relation then do they bear to God, to his law, to his government? What relation do they bear to eternity? They are not fit for heaven; and they are not fit for the world of despair.

Permit me then to remark, that would you sustain your theory, you must furnish substantial and irrefragable evidence on three points. You must prove, first, that the law of God claims no control over propensities and dispositions; secondly, that it

cannot be violated by mere omissions of duty ; and thirdly, that human beings may exist in a state of entire neutrality in regard to the law of God, and possessing no moral character at all. If you fail to prove either of these points, your system is undermined and overthrown.

You must excuse me, my dear Sir, if I express in this connection, my strong apprehension that there is much in your favorite term *susceptibilities*, which is calculated to perplex, and even to mislead. Not that I suspect you to have intended any thing of the kind. I have perfect confidence in the candor of your mind, and the simplicity of your intentions. Yet I must confess for myself, that with the most earnest desire to ascertain your meaning, I have been as effectually baffled, as if you really intended not to be understood.

At times I have supposed that by *susceptibilities*, you intend simply those instincts, appetites and passions which are necessary and constituent parts of our nature. These, you maintain, are in themselves innocent ; and here I have nothing to object. But I soon perceive that according to your representation, these innocent susceptibilities *certainly lead to sin, and only to sin*. Here commence my perplexity and surprise. You then inform me that these susceptibilities are precisely *the same in nature* with those possessed by Adam in paradise, and by the spotless Saviour himself. And here my perplexity and surprise, to say nothing of my regret, arise to the highest pitch.

Hence I am compelled to resort to another supposition ; or to consider the appetites and passions in question as having gained an unnatural ascendancy, and as spurning the control of reason and the divine law. On this supposition, I can satisfactorily account for all the sins of individuals, and all the moral disorders of our world. But here I am perplexed again, and find a new abyss opening before me. Is it possible that these fertile sources of evil, these effective causes of sin, can be themselves perfectly innocent ? Can they have existed, in the very smallest degree, in Adam while un-fallen, in the angels, in the Saviour himself ? These are suppositions from which reason revolts, and the heart recoils.

You think, indeed, that to admit the innocence of these instincts, appetites, &c. originally implanted in man, is inconsistent with the ordinarily received doctrine of original sin. And you maintain that President Edwards, by this admission, aban-

dons the ground of a depravity which is *innate* or *contemporaneous with our being*. In your commentary on Romans (Excursus 6.) you represent him, in this point, not only as inconsistent with himself, but as virtually giving countenance to your own views. Yet I cannot but apprehend that you mi-take this great divine. His doctrine is, that "the absence of positive good principles, and the withholding of special divine influence leaving the common natural principles of self-love, natural appetite, &c. which were in man in innocence—leaving them to themselves, without the government of superior divine principles, will certainly be followed by the corruption, yea, the total corruption of the heart. Thus," he declares, "the corruption of nature came on Adam immediately on his fall." He maintains, likewise, that all Adam's posterity commence their existence *precisely in this state*; "they come into the world inere *flesh*, entirely under the government of natural and inferior principles, and so become wholly corrupt, as Adam did." This is his representation. How then can he be said to abandon the ground of a depravity which is *innate*, and *contemporaneous with our being*?

LETTER VI.

THE THEORY UNDERMINED AND DESTROYED BY ITS OWN CONCESSIONS.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

In discussing your theory thus far, I have aimed to show that it is hostile to sound philosophy, and the word of God. Pardon me if I proceed, and attempt to point out some of its inconsistencies with your own repeated admissions and statements. On this ungracious part of the subject, I will endeavor to be as brief as possible.

First. You admit that infants have no holiness. Here, then, is a *defect*. And let me ask, what is the *nature* of this defect? Is it innocent, or the reverse? On your principles it is innocent; for infants themselves are innocent. Yet for this defect of holiness, this *innocent* defect, they are, upon your theory, excluded

by a just and benevolent God from heaven. And more than this (for I do not suspect you of holding to an intermediate or purgatorial state) they must be consigned to hopeless and everlasting misery.

Secondly. From this holiness, so necessary to save them from eternal woe, and to bring them to heaven, they are, by your theory, *hopelessly debarred*. You hold that sin consists in *voluntary transgression of known law*, and that *nothing else is sin*. Now from this principle, I have the clearest right to infer that holiness, the opposite of sin, consists in voluntary obedience to known law. But of this voluntary obedience, and of the knowledge implied in it, infants are equally and entirely incapable. And thus that becomes absolutely essential to their salvation, which is absolutely impossible.

Thirdly. You assert that there is, in our very nature, a *germ* which, when developed, renders *all the motives to virtue insufficient to overcome the force of enticement to sin*. This germ, you declare, must, *through the grace of the Holy Spirit, be regulated, changed, modified, eradicated even (if it must be so.)* Yet this *germ* is, on your principles perfectly innocent. Do you not then assign to the Holy Spirit, a work perfectly new, and perfectly needless? Is there any doctrine better understood in the Christian church than this, that the Holy Spirit, in his work of renovation, subdues and eradicates nothing but sin?

Fourthly. While you assert the necessity of regeneration for infants, you certainly will not deny this necessity as it regards the adult. Here, then, are two species of regeneration, entirely distinct, and essentially different; one, for those who have not one particle of real sin; another, for those in whom the principles of sin are deeply radicated, and awfully matured. Does the Scripture any where explicitly recognize this distinction, or even remotely hint at it? Does common sense, does reason, does sound philosophy give it countenance? Does not your own discerning mind, on cool reflection, repudiate it?

Fifthly. That regeneration which, in one view of your system, seems inexplicable and needless, appears, in another view, absolutely impossible. I have shown that if, as you state, there can be no sin without an explicit knowledge of the law, it directly follows, that without the same knowledge, there can be no holiness. And I think you will admit that the argument is strictly *a fortiori*. For if it is clear that the law of God must be known, in order to its being transgressed, it is still more clearly needful to be known in order to its being obeyed. If, then, holiness

consists in obedience or conformity to the law, and if regeneration consists in restoring human beings to holiness, it follows that the infant mind, being incapable of a knowledge of the law, is equally incapable of being regenerated.

I must touch one point farther. You explicitly declare that infants, if saved at all, must be saved by Christ. But in what sense are they saved by Christ? Does he make atonement for them? This you deny. He does not make atonement, you say, (p. 47,) “for their *actual* sin, for the simple reason that they have committed none; and atonement for a non-entity is impossible.” The doctrine of *original* sin you discard. From these principles it would seem to follow that infants are not sinners in any sense. But for this, we are not left to mere inference. You have very intelligibly signified (p. 41,) that “children cannot be characterized as *sinner*s in any sense which comports with Vitringa’s definition of sin”—and this you contend is the true definition. This is going far indeed. But must you not go farther still? Must you not prepare for these spotless beings—saved, but not from *sin*—saved without atonement—saved without a real regeneration—saved, indeed, *without salvation*, an appropriate *song*, and a very different song, from that which has hitherto echoed through the arches of heaven? For how is it possible that the beings described can unite in the humble, soul-stirring acknowledgment “to Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood?”

LETTER VII.

THE THEORY COMPARED WITH THE PUBLICLY AVOWED OPINIONS
OF ITS AUTHOR.—THEOLOGY OF NEW-ENGLAND.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

The stage of the discussion at which I have arrived, admonishes me to subject your theory to one additional test; to compare it, I mean, with your own publicly avowed opinions. It is known to the Churches of New-England, and to the community, that you have solemnly declared your faith in the doctrines of the gospel, as expressed in the Shorter Catechism of the West-

minster Assembly. Of course the expectation has been extensively cherished, that your instructions as a minister of the gospel, and as one employed in preparing future ministers for the churches, would be in accordance with the principles embraced in the instrument mentioned above.

Concerning this celebrated formulary, I may remark, that no enlightened mind attaches to it either inspiration, or infallibility, or perfection. By a great portion of the most judicious and impartial, it has been regarded as a plain, faithful, and, generally speaking, felicitous exposition of the leading doctrines of Revelation.

Its views of *human depravity and guilt* will be found in the following quotations.

"The covenant being made with Adam not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression."

"The sinfulness of that state whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it."

If, to some, a portion of these expressions may seem strong, and even exaggerated, few will deny that these very expressions receive much countenance from the language of Scripture. While they represent all the posterity of Adam as "sinning in him," and "falling with him," the Bible declares, in its own simple and energetic language, that "in Adam all die." In both cases, doubtless, there is metaphor. And in both, there is a solemn and appalling meaning. In regard to the phrase, "guilt of Adam's first sin," it is well known that many great divines have considered *guilt* as intending simply *exposure* or *liability to punishment*; and this, either for one's own sin, or that of another. Dr. Watts, who was certainly no bigot, remarks on the expression in view, that it must *at least signify our interest in that sin, so far as to be exposed to pain and suffering on account of it*. And you yourself, my dear Sir, readily admit that Adam's sin has actually brought on his posterity the bitterest consequences, and even exposed them to everlasting ruin. Thus it appears that this expression, so startling in the view of some, and so much denounced by others, is susceptible, and not unnaturally susceptible, of a construction from which few who believe the Scripture, can dissent.

But I forget that it belongs to you, rather than to myself, to defend the venerable Assembly in this case. Still I am under the necessity of subjoining the following quotations from your Essay.

"The advocates for *native* sin do not seem to me to be sufficiently aware, that with the very same principles of interpretation which they defend, and carry into practice, conclusions might be made out from the Scriptures, exceedingly diverse from those which they undertake to establish, or would be willing to admit." pp. 38, 39.

"I do not believe in the expediency or propriety of making *two sorts of sin*." p. 49.

"That thing in the Saviour, and in Adam, which was *not* sin, when existing in one degree, is not sin when existing in ten degrees or more at the present day, in all of our race, while in their native state or condition." p. 51.

"If our native propensities are themselves a *sin*, then the conclusion seems to be plain and inevitable, that God is the author of sin." p. 52.

"Even in this inferior, fallen, degraded condition, *sin*, in the proper sense of this word, viz. a voluntary transgression of divine law by a rational, moral and free agent, is not a thing in its own nature *necessary*, nor strictly inevitable. It can be committed only by an act of choice." p. 56.

"What, after all that has been said and written on the subject of *original sin*, has been satisfactorily advanced to show that the Scriptures recognize two sorts of sin?" p. 57.

"What kind of a sin is it, which admits of neither contrition nor amendment?" p. 57.

"It (i. e. original sin) is plainly a sin, if it be one, which no effort, no prayer, no repentance, no amendment of life, no elevated piety, no conformity to God, can in any manner abate, change, or avoid. It is one, therefore, with which practical and experimental piety would seem to have little or nothing to do. Our guilt as to actual sin . . . is all that we are *practically* concerned with," &c. &c. p. 62.

"The reprobation topic of the early Reformers has been going by degrees out of the circle of topics in the later theology, or if handled at all, it is treated with much circumspection and moderation. Along with this, a sin which is no sin, i. e. no transgression of any law, has been gradually disappearing also. Both views, in due time, will, as I fully believe, disappear from the horizon of current theology, and be considered only as belonging to the history of the past. The progress of sentiment is a pledge of this." p. 62.

These quotations I have introduced with some reluctance, and shall pass with very little comment. It would be obviously gratuitous, though perfectly easy, to show how materially they disagree with the Westminster formulary. Nor would it be less a work of supererogation to demonstrate that the framers of that instrument had no idea of a *corruption* which has no *moral*

evil in it, nor of a *depravity* which is *innocent*, nor of an *original sin* which (to use your own emphatic, though unguarded expression,) is *no sin*. But I forbear.

I must, however, remark, and with all freedom, that I think you rather unceremonious with those ministerial brethren who are backward to adopt your present views on the subject in question. They may have great respect for your learning and talents. Nor is it impossible that this very respect may have lent its aid to confirm them in their old-fashioned sentiments. For certainly there was a period when they contemplated you as pledged to maintain and vindicate the very same views; and they rejoiced in the thought that your fine powers and acquisitions were enlisted in the defence of what they deemed important gospel truth. The movements of their minds may, likewise, be less rapid than yours. And does not this afford a natural exercise for your patience and candor? Perhaps, too, they may perceive in your theory less of *maturity* than it may hereafter attain, and may therefore think it safe and expedient to wait for such an issue. Indeed, they may view it as among *conceivable possibilities* that you may abandon your present theory for another not less questionable. In this case, it will be surely an unpleasant dilemma, to find themselves compelled either to forsake their guide, or to follow him in the dark.

In a word, my dear Sir, I cannot but apprehend you are far too sanguine in anticipating the speedy disappearance of the doctrine in debate—the doctrine of *original sin*. Unquestionably, it is one of the grand pillars on which the Andover Institution rests. Can that which was true in 1808, be false in 1839? Rather let me ask, can a doctrine which the church of Christ, from its first existence, has defended with such energy, and cherished with such ardor, be ever blotted out and lost. I have confidence that it will not. Nor will I resign the hope that you yourself may yet be found among its friends and champions.

There is one topic upon which I must emphatically express my surprise. You seem utterly unaware that any essential errors are abroad in the church, and indeed, that any novel opinions of considerable importance have been broached in our day. On my part, I will admit that, many, if not most of the religious theories of the time, which make pretensions to novelty, are but resurrections of ancient and long-buried errors. But that false opinions in religion abound, some in a form of arrogance, others of insinuation, and a third class assuming each form alternately,

according to circumstances, is, I think, undeniable. As you are a careful observer of human nature, I have no doubt you will readily grant me one point. There is danger, real and great danger, lest those very attempts which have been made to suppress error, and which to many appear unauthorized and unjust, should excite prejudice against the truth. That the opposition made to the progress of false principles, is generally factitious, or needless, the offspring of an overbearing or litigious spirit, I cannot believe. Least of all can I believe that the debate which is now pursued by two very considerable parties in the Christian church, on the subject of *native depravity*, is a debate of small importance.

That you should consider yourself as contending, in this debate, for what may be properly called New England views of theology, as you seem to intimate, p. 268, is to me, not only surprising, but astonishing. The very reverse of this, I think, is evident and undeniable. If, however, you demand my reasons, let me offer a very brief statement.

If, among the great and good men who have blessed New England, in the course of the last hundred years, there was one, who, more than any other, gave a character and stamp to its theology, it was doubtless the first President Edwards. To almost every important subject in religion, he gave, in its turn, his masterly mind and pen. Among the topics which engaged his special attention, was that of *original sin*. He defended the doctrine, as you know, against Dr. John Taylor, a celebrated champion of Arminianism and Socinianism in England; and his defence, though characterized by some minor peculiarities, is grounded on the grand principles of orthodoxy. You have discussed the same subject in nearly eighty pages; and if I have any understanding of your drift and meaning, you agree much more nearly with Taylor, than with Edwards. You certainly dissent from Edwards on the grand and vital point of his argument, namely, that the propensity to transgression which is found in all human beings, is an evil, depraved, sinful propensity. Nor is it less certain that you adopt, and endeavor to enforce, not a few of the very same objections against the doctrine of original sin, which are employed by Taylor on the subject. Such being the case, I am utterly unable to perceive the validity of your claim, as the professed champion of New England divinity. The fact, I would hope and believe, is entirely the reverse. At least, you can then, and then only, prove that you speak the sen-

timents of the Christians and ministers of New England, when you shall prove that the Christians and ministers of New England have abandoned the views of Edwards.

LETTER VIII.

OBJECTIONS AGAINST NATIVE DEPRAVITY CONSIDERED.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

To your *objections* against the doctrine of native depravity, I will now pay a brief attention ; not, however, without one or two prefatory remarks.

When a doctrine claims to be drawn directly from the Scripture, and has clearly established this claim, all objections against it are out of place. The reason is equally obvious and conclusive. Such objections must necessarily be false. They may be plausible and imposing, and they may *seem* unanswerable. Still they are false. If we may not consider the word of God as sufficient to settle any point, however previously doubtful or disputed, we may as well close the book at once. We are all of us in the habit of believing a multitude of truths concerning which we must confess ourselves unable to refute every objection which ingenuity or sophistry could bring against them. On no other terms could the business of common life proceed, even for a day. And shall we stumble at those truths of religion which, however plausibly opposed, still come to us with the force of demonstration, and the stamp of heaven ?

But truth shuns not the light. It shrinks from no test to which it can be fairly brought. To your principal objections in the present case, I will attempt a brief reply.

You allege the Saviour's declaration (Mat. 18, 3.) " Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and *become as little children*, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven ;" and apparently to prove that little children are *sinless* ; for you inquire afterwards, " What parent, what guardian of little children ever thought of taxing them with crime, or of alleging real *sin*, as a matter with which they stood chargeable ?" But you well know that most divines, and most intelligent readers, have viewed this

passage as simply signifying that children are *comparatively* harmless ; and that in their infantile state, the usual exhibitions of pride, ambition, &c. are not witnessed. But this is no proof that they have not the seminal principles of these evils. And this is clearly implied in your own remarks. "The Saviour," you say, "refers to them as examples of persons in whom the wicked passions are yet quiet, inactive, unexerted, undeveloped, and who therefore commit no *actual* or *active* sin." Do not these expressions obviously imply that the *radical principles* of such wicked passions *exist* in them, and will in due time be developed. This admission of yours is all which the advocates of native depravity require. Perhaps the admission itself is an exemplification of the maxim which you have quoted from Horace (though not with your usual accuracy,)

Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret.

There is another remark, too important to be omitted. While illustrating the estimate which the God of heaven places upon *little children*, you quote the Saviour's declaration (v. 10) "I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." And had you proceeded to the very next verse, you would have found him saying, "For the Son of man is come to *save* that which was *lost*." Here, then, in the very same passage in which the Saviour speaks in terms of such tenderness concerning children, he declares that they are *lost*. Of the meaning and force of this term, as used in Scripture, you are well aware. It intends nothing less than a state of moral depravity and ruin.

I now pass, with some reluctance, to consider another objection. It is this : that if our native propensities are sinful, the conclusion is inevitable, that God is the author of sin. In avowing my reluctance to meet this objection, I do not admit that it is either pertinent or formidable. My grief is, to meet it possessed of your sanction. That it has been the favorite resort of thousands of infidels, of errorists, and impenitent self-justifiers, you know full well. And though I do not suspect you of intending to *give* encouragement to these unhappy beings, I am not the less convinced that they will *take* it. Every individual of either of these classes who reads your pages, will find a patronage which he never enjoyed before, and probably never anticipated.

Let me say, in the first place, suppose the objection could not be satisfactorily met and answered ; what then ? You will ad-

mit that there are many truths, or, if you will allow the expression, *duplicates* of truths, which have never yet, by any arts of reasoning, been satisfactorily reconciled. You believe in the universal agency of God, and the entire dependence of man, as it regards every action, word, thought, volition and feeling. You equally believe in the perfect liberty, and undiminished responsibility, of yourself and your fellow-beings. But your powerful mind has never yet removed the darkness, the apparent inconsistency, which hover around these seemingly incompatible truths. How easy to draw from the perfect benevolence, holiness and power of God, an argument apparently conclusive and unanswerable, that in a universe of his creation, neither sin nor misery can possibly exist. Yet in despite of this seeming demonstration, we have but to open our eyes, to perceive that sin and misery exist; and we have but to believe the Bible, to learn that they will exist to eternity.

The point to which I come is this. If two doctrines, or facts, seemingly incompatible, meet us in the book of God, we are not to institute a quarrel between them, nor to take sides with one against the other; but cordially to receive them both, believing that the inconsistency is of our own making—imaginary and not real. Nor is there any other method in which we can possibly treat the Bible with the respect which it claims.

In the present case, you believe that if our native propensities are sinful, it follows of necessity that God is the author of sin. But on this point, thousands of great and good minds, thousands of reasoning and philosophic minds, are against you. And if the great mass of the Christian church, from the earliest times, has rightly interpreted the sacred records, the word of God is against you.

You doubtless recollect the reply of an Apostle to an ancient objector; and this, in a case which has many points of similarity to that under consideration. "Who art thou, O man, that replest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?" Should you, for a moment, suppose that the doctrine you have impugned, is true, you would of course believe that every objection raised against it, merits as little deference, and would meet from the Apostle, were he alive, a similar rebuke.

But though we may not arrogantly object, in a case so awfully profound, we may, at least, humbly inquire. And is it not a question worthy of your serious consideration, whether the ob-

jection you have introduced, is not a pure mistake ; a flagrant *petitio principii* ?

President Edwards, the powerful and unbending advocate of the doctrine of *original sin*, repelled with utmost decision the thought that this doctrine makes him who is the Author of our being, the Author of our depravity. Permit me to commend the language which he holds on this subject to your serious and candid consideration. "To account," says he, "for a sinful corruption of nature, yea, a total native depravity of the heart of man, there is not the least need of supposing any evil quality infused, implanted, or wrought into the nature of man by any positive cause or influence whatever, either from God or the creature ; or of supposing that man is conceived and born with a *fountain of evil* in his heart, such as is any thing properly positive The absence of positive good principles, and so the withholding of a special divine influence to impart and maintain those good principles, leaving the common natural principles of self-love, natural appetite, &c. (which were in man in innocence) leaving these, I say to themselves, without the government of superior divine principles—will certainly be followed by the corruption, yea, the total corruption of the heart, without occasion for any positive influence at all." In a subsequent passage, having referred to those unhappy beings who are abandoned by the Spirit of God, and given up to vile affections and lusts, he thus reasons : "Now if the *continuance of sin*, and its increase and prevalence, may be in consequence of God's disposal, by withholding his grace, that is needful, under such circumstances, to prevent it, without God's being the Author of that *continuance* and prevalence of sin ; then, by parity of reason, may the *being of sin*, in the case of Adam, be in consequence of God's disposal, by withholding his grace, needful to prevent it, without his being the Author of that *being of sin*."

He adds afterwards : "That the posterity of Adam should be born without holiness, and so with a depraved nature, comes to pass as much by the established course of nature, as the continuance of a corrupt disposition in a particular person, after he once has it ; or as much as Adam's continuing unholy and corrupt, after he had once lost his holiness."

Such are the suggestions and reasonings of one who has been considered by the best judges on either side of the Atlantic, an able reasoner, a profound philosopher, and a truly scriptural divine. I am aware that you freely and repeatedly charge him with

inconsistency. But perhaps the charge is more easily preferred than proved. Others, who have studied his treatise on the subject in question with great care, have found it replete with sober, discriminative thought, and sound reasoning ; and have regarded the Author, with some few exceptions, as an eminently safe and scriptural guide.

But suppose that we turn our back on Edwards, and on all our ancient, long-tried, and long-trusted guides. Suppose that, abandoning the road which has been trodden by the multitude of the faithful, for eighteen centuries, we follow some modern theorist into his labyrinth ; can you secure us from being lost in its endless mazes ? Should we even surrender ourselves to your own favorite theory, may it not possibly conduct us to the same " yawning gulf " from which you shrink with so much horror ? You greatly mistake, my dear Sir, if you think that the orthodox scheme of human depravity is the only scheme encumbered with difficulties. Difficulties of the most appalling kind throng around your own. In the very point where it confidently promises to give us relief, it gives us no relief at all. While it confesses that the race is suffering immense and infinite evils through its first progenitor, it denies that *constituted connection* which alone establishes and illustrates the equity of such a procedure. It endues every individual of the human family with *susceptibilities* which certainly lead to sin, and only to sin ; and these very susceptibilities it traces directly to the creative power of God. It maintains that they are altogether innocent ; while yet it maintains that they exclude their subjects from heaven, and expose them to interminable woe.

There is another difficulty still, and of the most serious kind. You advocate a species of *regeneration* altogether novel ; a regeneration loaded with the same odium which you so freely charge on that of your opponents ; a regeneration strictly *physical*. For how can it be otherwise, when it operates on the innocent susceptibilities of the mind ; susceptibilities which are essential to the human being ; susceptibilities which, as you state, the Saviour must have possessed, or he could not have been properly man ?

And when shall these perplexities cease ? When shall the inquiring, anxious, and almost tortured mind find repose ?—I answer, then, and then alone, when it simply repairs to the heavenly oracle ; when it surrenders itself without reserve to the teachings of infinite wisdom. The Bible lets us know that man is his own destroyer ; that the race, once pure and holy, has be-

come awfully and universally degenerate ; that this degeneracy commenced with the first parent, and was transmitted by him to all his progeny ; and that God, the Author of our being, and the Sovereign Controller of our destiny, is *not* the Author of our sin. These things are all plain. With these the humble Christian is content. If, beyond these, perplexities and troubles arise, they are the gratuitous, self-inflicted perplexities and troubles of scholars and philosophers. The plain good man, who simply believes his Bible, who can follow where it leads, and pause where it stops, effectually escapes them.

There is one point of no small importance, which, though perplexed to philosophy, is perfectly plain to common sense. To this point, I ask, for a moment, your particular attention. Your scheme takes it for granted that no propensities or dispositions which are born with us, can be, properly speaking, sinful ; and that for such propensities or dispositions, no man can condemn himself, or be condemned by others. I cannot but apprehend that on a moment's consideration, you will perceive this to be an entire mistake.

Take a man who is avaricious, or impure, or malicious, or revengeful. What do we require, in order to fasten guilt upon him, but the simple fact, that he possesses a character of this kind ? When was it ever pleaded, in mitigation of the guilt of such an one, that he possessed and exhibited the character from childhood, or from infancy, or that his father was so before him ? On the contrary, the earlier the period to which the vice can be traced, and the stronger the evidence that it was *inborn* and *inbred*, the deeper, in the general estimation, is the stain of guilt. If two men have been equally concerned in the same murder, and one only is to be selected for punishment, will not the selection naturally fall on him who gave the earliest evidence of a malicious, murderous disposition ? These are principles on which the sober and thinking part of mankind are perfectly agreed. And nothing is requisite, but the admission of these principles, in their full extent, to the entire subversion of your theory. For it is of the very essence of that theory, that *native, inbred depravity* is a thing either *perfectly innocent*, or *absolutely impossible*.

I perceive that my remarks are in danger of being extended to a very undesirable length. If, hitherto, I have been somewhat diffuse, you, my dear Sir, who are well acquainted with the difficulties of the case, will indulge me your candor. In what

remains, I shall study great brevity. And as the leading principles pertaining to the subject have been discussed, I hope my attempt may not be unsuccessful.

You seem to object (p. 58,) to the doctrine of *original sin*, that the thing itself is *forbidden by no law*. But you certainly will not deny that the holy and unalterable law of God requires of all his rational creatures, *holiness in the inward part*; holiness of principle and disposition, as well as of action; holiness in every period of their existence.

The objection above named, you follow up by remarking; "It has often been said, that sin inherent is a *punishment* for the sin of Adam, which is ours by *imputation*." And you inquire: "If the sin is merely *putative*, would not a common law of justice demand that the punishment should be merely putative? How can we unite, as *par cum pari*, putative crime and veritable damnation?—If, in these suggestions, your object was to *amuse* a certain class of readers, you have probably succeeded. But the subject is too grave for ridicule. It is difficult to meet a sportive remark with a serious reply. I therefore refer back the whole matter to your more solemn and chastised reflections.

Another of your objections against original sin is, that none of its advocates have been able to show that it is a sin which *can be repented of*. But is not the whole force of this objection derived from the unnatural use of a term? Suppose that in the place of repentance, you substitute *humiliation*. Will not your objection, in this case, lose even its plausibility? And *here*, permit me to remark, you have touched a point of great practical importance; a point of Christian experience; a point of *fact*; a point which, I am constrained to say, you cannot have considered with the deep attention which it claims.

Far be it from me to allege the experience, fancied or real, of an individual, in opposition to any established principle of truth. Its weight would be lighter than a feather. But the experience of the church of God, of the pious, the heaven-taught, of every age and clime, is a serious affair. *You cannot dispose of it in a paragraph*. And I affirm with confidence, that the experience of the church of God, of the pious of every age and clime, stands in direct opposition to your theory.

Your assertion that original sin, the native depravity of the heart, is a thing "with which practical and experimental piety would seem to have little or nothing to do," needs much seri-

ous re-consideration. It is something with which the children of God in every age, and especially the most devoted and pious among them, have had *much, very much to do*, through life, to their dying day.

The language of David, that great model of piety, in the fifty-first psalm, is perfectly explicit and intelligible. It is a humble, heart-broken acknowledgment of native corruption ; of deep, inbred depravity. So the pious of every age have viewed it. And they have found in it, a description but too accurate, of their own bitter experience. Their hearts have echoed in response to its tones of sadness.

The complaints of the Apostle Paul, in the seventh chapter to the Romans, I am constrained to consider as of the same general character. Your arguments, designed to remove this remarkable chapter out of the pale of Christian experience, are more ingenious than convincing. The most learned and judicious divines are against you. And those plain Christians who have little to guide them, but the dictates of common sense, and the teachings of heavenly wisdom, will continue, as before, to receive humiliation and comfort from the experience of the Apostle. Indeed, I think you have committed precisely the same mistake here, with that which I have before noted, in the fifth chapter of the epistle. You have made the previous discovery that this was not the proper time and place for the introduction of Christian experience. And hence you have argued that the Apostle's explicit and strong expressions on the subject (as others have viewed them) must certainly have reference to something else. I readily admit, my dear Sir, the importance of accurately marking, in the sacred writers, their design and scope, with the connection and bearing of the points introduced. And you will as readily admit that this is an affair requiring much tact and skill, much deep reflection, and, I will add, much *submission of mind* to the holy Oracles. For want of these requisites, many a learned Commentator, apparently in pursuit of the truth of God, has embraced a cloud ; and while he has excited a smile in his intelligent readers, has sadly misled the injudicious and unreflecting.

As an objection against the doctrine of original sin, you urge the fact, that "its advocates are far from being agreed, what sort of punishment it requires or deserves." 'This objection you attempt to enforce by presenting a long array of learned divines, ancient and modern, who have speculated and conjectured vari-

ously on the subject, and most of them not very wisely. By most of your readers, you will be considered as aiming, in this procedure, to throw obscurity, not to say ridicule, on the subject at large. But let me seriously ask you, where is the doctrine in the whole compass of theology, which can stand a test like this? Where is the truth, however clearly stamped with the seal of Inspiration itself, which has not given occasion to the whims and vagaries, even of learned men? To me, the variety of opinions you have detailed, afford one instruction, at least. It is this : that when men abandon the simple guidance of Scripture, and undertake to explore a path of their own—learning and ignorance, wisdom and folly, stand on much the same level. Our only real wisdom and safety lie in speaking with the Bible, and in being silent with the Bible. This is a lesson which I have been learning all my life ; and I respectfully invite my Christian and ministerial brethren to learn it with me.

You object that if actual sin must be traced to a *predominant disposition* to sin, it is impossible, on this principle, to explain the sin of apostate angels, and of the first progenitor of our race. Your argument seems to be, that if the angels and Adam sinned without this disposition or propensity, so may all mankind. But where is the force of this reasoning? Are not the cases thus compared, entirely dissimilar? The apostasy of Adam was a single, transient event. And though in many respects inscrutable, it certainly does not need to be accounted for by any fixed and permanent cause. The apostasy of the angels who sinned, was likewise, in a sense, a single and transient event ; for although great numbers were involved, they all apostatized at the same period, and, as it may well be supposed, under one common impulse. This event, then, requires no fixed and permanent cause for its explanation. But how entirely different from this is the case of the great human family. Here are millions and millions of beings, successively rising into existence, in all climes, countries and ages, and all pursuing the same course of disobedience and rebellion against their Maker and Sovereign. Not a solitary exception occurs. Now for this uniform and universal *effect*, must there not be assigned a *cause* equally uniform and universal? If all these countless millions are under the influence of one common inclination or propensity to evil, the cause inquired for is discovered. And it is discovered nowhere else.

You object again, that the theory of *original sin* “ maintains the necessity of a *nature*, a *taste*, or *faculty*, which is physiologically a new creation by the act of the Holy Spirit in the regeneration of the soul.” You compel me, my dear Sir, to complain of you for encumbering our very simple theory with so many hard words. In pointing our fellow-mortals the way to heaven, we urge on them the necessity of a *new heart*, or a *new disposition*, such as God alone can impart. We sometimes describe this change as a *passing from death to life*. And here, we have not only the spirit, but the letter of the Scripture on our side. The idea of a new *faculty* we discard. To the terms *nature* and *taste*, in this connection, we have no bigoted attachment, though we should rejoice that all our beloved hearers should “ taste and see that the Lord is good ;” nor, indeed, can we be content unless they are partakers of a *nature* not only *new*, but *divine*. As to the terms *physiological*, or *psychological*, in reference to the new creation, we wish to address plain truth to plain understandings ; and we therefore let these hard words alone. But we claim the right to make the freest use of the representations, the thoughts, and the very terms of Scripture, whoever may oppose, or whoever pervert them. Now, my dear Sir, permit me to ask, do you not yourself pursue the same general course ? Such, I know, were eminently the characteristics of those lucid, energetic and evangelical discourses of yours, to which I have listened with delight, in years that are past. And such, I would hope, is the general character of your preaching now ; for I can scarcely conceive that to *change*, would be to *improve* it. Why, then, with such authorities, and such guides, should we not be permitted to pursue in peace our old-fashioned and straight-forward way of preaching ?

You object, finally, to our theory of depravity, that it makes the soul a kind of *moral* or *psychological machine* ; and you have much to say of *water-wheels* and *wind-wheels*, &c. But these are matters which somewhat elude my comprehension. And were it otherwise, I should think it the kindest part to you, to myself, and to the reader of these pages, to pass them entirely in silence.

LETTER IX.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND SUGGESTIONS.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

In the preceding letters, I have, with great freedom and plainness, endeavored to detect and expose what I cannot but regard as important errors in your Essay. I have likewise attempted to remove your leading mistakes, and refute your principal objections, in reference to what is usually considered the orthodox theory of human depravity. I would here willingly lay down my pen. But the great importance which my mind attaches to the subject, constrains me to offer a few additional remarks.

I am anxious, in the first place, to remove an impression which your Essay seems calculated to leave on the minds of readers, and which I think equally unjust and pernicious. You labor much to show that the old theory of depravity is at war with sound reason and philosophy; and while you anticipate its speedy passage to oblivion, you would have us think that it is already discarded by men of enlightened and liberal minds. Your representations on this subject need much correction. You cannot be ignorant that many of the ancient heathen philosophers and poets had deeper (I had almost said, more *scriptural*) views of human depravity, than some modern preachers.

"We are born," says Seneca, "in such a condition, that we are not subject to fewer disorders of the mind, than of the body. All vices are in all men, though they do not break out in every one." The poet Ovid feelingly exclaims,

I see the right, and I approve it too,
Detest the wrong, and yet the wrong pursue.

Is not this the complaint of one who feels an *innate bias to evil*, overbearing the dictates of reason, and of conscience itself?

While I am grieved to see some Christian divines rejecting with scorn, what I firmly believe to be the Scripture doctrine of man's apostasy and depravity, I am consoled to think that there are great and eminent statesmen who receive it in simplicity, and cherish it as the only true philosophy. You will admit that

WILBERFORCE was no bigot. Listen to him, if you please, a moment, and then judge for yourself what part this exalted man, if now living, would take in the great contest respecting human depravity. "How," says he, "on any principles of common reasoning, can we account for it," (i. e. the prevalence of ungodliness and vice in the world,) "but by conceiving that man, since he came out of the hands of his Creator, has contracted a taint, and that the venom of the subtle poison has been communicated through the race of Adam, every where exhibiting incontestible marks of its fatal malignity?" And afterward; "All other solutions are unsatisfactory, whilst the potent cause which has been assigned does abundantly and can alone sufficiently account for the effect. Thus it appears that the corruption of human nature is proved by the same mode of reasoning as has been deemed conclusive in establishing the existence, and ascertaining the laws of the principle of gravitation; that the doctrine rests on the same solid basis as the sublime philosophy of Newton; that it is not a mere speculation—an uncertain but ingenious theory—but the sure result of large and actual experiment, deduced from incontestable facts, and still more fully approving its truth, by harmonizing with the several parts, and accounting for the various phenomena, jarring otherwise and inexplicable, of the great system of the universe."

I cannot more properly close this quotation, than by repeating a line which the excellent Author borrows from the great English Poet:

How charming is DIVINE PHILOSOPHY!

The views of Wilberforce on the subject of native depravity, you well know, were substantially the views of the great multitude of pious and learned divines of the two last centuries, who were lights of the world while living, and whose memory is embalmed in the hearts of the pious. They were the views of Owen, and Baxter, and Bates, and Howe, and Flavel, and Watts, and Doddridge, and Scott. They were the views of Edwards, and Bellamy, and Davies, and Dwight. It will not be easy to convince the world that these men were shallow reasoners, or sour-minded bigots; or that the doctrine which they laid as the foundation of solid theology and vital piety, was mere fancy and delusion.

In opposition to the views you have repeatedly expressed, I must declare my decided conviction that the doctrine in ques-

tion is a doctrine of fundamental importance, and vital to the whole scheme of theoretic and practical Christianity. If, indeed, as you seem to suppose, it is an affair of mere *terminology*, then I have a right to inquire, why so much zeal for a *new* terminology? If no new doctrine is to be taught, and of course, no new light given, why should mere *words* be made the occasion of convulsing the church, and pouring contumely on its ministers? Suppose that the advocates of native depravity are even extremely tenacious of the old phraseology, believing that to part with it, is to hazard the loss of scriptural truth, may they not claim the forbearance of their brethren in opposition, who, upon their own principles, can allege no adequate motive for imposing a *new* phraseology? Must a sacrifice be made, and a danger incurred, without the shadow of compensating advantage?

But that this is a mere verbal debate, or a debate of small importance, is confidently denied. It cannot be believed that *moral purity* and *moral impurity*, that *innocence* and *sin*, are convertible terms.

All who read the Bible find it much occupied in delineating the character of man. Most readers have perceived in this delineation, a character of real, sinful depravity. Others assume the position that this depravity is *innocent*; and they are very confident that a doctrine of this kind will answer all the purposes of religion. But are they *sure* of this? May they not mistake? May not that which they declare to be a mere *modification* of a truth, be a real *denial* of a truth? May not the truth thus denied be a point of essential importance? May it not have aspects and bearings which they have never discovered, nor so much as suspected? Such is the infirmity of the human mind, that no man who denies, or expunges from his system, or even *modifies*, a single truth of Inspiration, can be assured that he is not *corrupting the whole system of religion, doctrinal and practical*. What a tremendous responsibility does he then assume—especially if the truth in question belongs not to the superstructure of religion, but to its very foundation. Such is unquestionably the case with the doctrine we are considering. By most divines, and by most Christians, it has been thought hitherto, that the man who is essentially wrong in his views of human depravity, can be right nowhere in religion.

A word, here, on the subject of Pelagianism. I despise the thought of confuting a system by affixing to it a bad name. The name just mentioned, I should certainly not have introduced, had

not you, my dear Sir, invited it, and almost made it necessary. You disclaim, for your system, the character of Pelagianism. But what are the facts? The grand question respecting human depravity is simply this; Is it *native*, or is it *superinduced*? It is *not native*, but *superinduced*, say the Pelagians. The same, precisely, says the system which you maintain.

The *practical bearing* of the system in view is too plain to be mistaken. On this subject, let us listen a moment to the Author just now quoted. Speaking of human corruption, he says, "It is here, let it not be forgotten, that our foundation must be laid; otherwise our superstructure, whatever we may think of it, will one day or other prove tottering and insecure. This is therefore no metaphysical speculation, but a practical matter. Slight and superficial conceptions of our state of natural degradation, and of our insufficiency to recover from it ourselves, fall in too well with our natural inconsiderateness, and produce that fatal insensibility to the divine warning to "flee from the wrath to come," which we cannot but observe to prevail so generally."

These are the dictates of reason and common sense. If the gospel comes to us as the grand remedy for a moral malady, who but must see, that not only our estimate of its worth, but our experience of its sanative power, will be much in proportion to our sense of the malignity of the disease? None but deep views of our utter and awful depravity can generate real humility. And humility is the *all in all* of religion. It is likewise the only soil in which all other Christian virtues take root and grow. A religion which does not make and keep us humble, is no religion at all. A religion which ministers nutriment to our pride, is *worse* than none.

What the great Roman Orator says of the liberal arts, is true of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity. They are linked together by a common bond. Indeed, the mutual connection and dependence are far closer in this case, than in the former. Strike from the Christian system a single link, and soon the whole chain falls asunder, and disappears. Remove the radical depravity of the heart, and you have no place for any other truths of the gospel. And if you materially *modify* this doctrine, you soon find that the modifying process must *go through*. Regeneration becomes another thing. Repentance assumes a new aspect. The Christian conflict is dispensed with. The atonement loses half its value. And the song of *salvation by grace* becomes an empty sound.

Are you not alarmed, my dear Sir, at the *entire revolution* which the new theory respecting original sin is introducing into the whole system of Christian doctrine, and Christian practice? Does it not wrest from the Supreme Being the sovereign control over his own world, by denying that he could have excluded sin from his system; by denying, too, that he can exercise any such influence over free moral agents, as will effectually secure them from disobedience? Does it not substitute in the place of a *change of heart*, a mere *change of purpose*; a change of which *man* is the author, rather than God? Does it not, while verbally acknowledging the agency of the Holy Spirit in conversion, reduce that agency to a mere *suasive* influence, and deny its direct and efficient control over the heart? Does it not, by discarding the fact of *permanent dispositions*, discard the certainty of the saints' perseverance? Does it not, in the same way, discard that inward, spiritual warfare which is so much the uniform experience of Christians? Does it not subvert the doctrine of election, by resolving it into a mere certainty in the mind of God, whether the sinner will voluntarily turn, or voluntarily persist in impenitence? In a word, does it not divest the Supreme Being of his sovereignty and omnipotence in the work of human salvation, and almost transfer the same attributes to man?

I might speak of those errors of the scheme which are more immediately practical. But I am unwilling to enlarge on so painful a subject. Still, there is one point which is too important to be omitted. The theory in question lays the foundation of all moral obligation in *self-interest*. It declares that "of all voluntary action, the happiness of the agent, in some form, is the *ultimate end*." It declares that "self-love, or the *desire of happiness*, is the primary cause or reason of all acts of preference or choice, which fix supremely on any object." A most comfortable doctrine this, to every sinner upon earth! For where is the sinner who does not love himself? Where is the sinner who does not desire his own happiness? But what becomes of those passages of Scripture, so continually recurring, which call us off from these low propensities and aims, and which place all real virtue in SUPREME LOVE TO GOD, and REGARD TO HIS GLORY? And what follows, but that the principle in question goes directly to annihilate all moral distinctions; to reduce the good and the bad in the human family to one common level; in a word, to banish not only all piety, but all virtue from the world? It is not too much to say, that a theory em-

bracing this principle, bears instamped on its very front, the deep, indelible brand of error and falsehood.

These strong expressions, my dear Sir, are the result of strong and decided conviction. To have said less, would have been treachery to the dictates of my understanding, my conscience, and my heart. At the same time, I am far from indulging the thought that the error just mentioned, has been adopted by you. Indeed, I must cling to the belief that many of the others which I have specified, are rejected by you, as cordially as by myself. Still, they belong to a system, an important and fundamental part of which, you have, to my unspeakable regret, undertaken to support.

Nor have I the least desire to cast reproach upon others who maintain the system in view. Many of them I know to be amiable and respectable men—irreproachable in life, and apparently devoted to the cause of God, and the interests of his church. I would hope, and this most sincerely, that the errors of their system have not reached their hearts, nor incorporated themselves with their practical judgment. Many of them, no doubt, are pursuing an object which appears to them both important and practicable. They would divest the doctrines of the gospel of what have been regarded as their harsher features. They would disencumber religion of what has been repulsive. By giving to the one, and the other, a modified and apparently philosophic character, they would recommend them to a more general acceptance than they have hitherto gained. In all this, it is my duty to judge charitably of their designs; while it is my right to consider them in a very great mistake. All history, all observation, all experience, unitedly declare that every attempt of the kind has proved abortive. The doctrines of the Bible are altogether imperious and unbending. They claim to be seen by their own light, and to be judged by their own evidences. They require from all an implicit, unquestioning submission. They hold no compromise, either with the demands of an arrogant philosophy, or the demands of sin. And whenever the professed friends of truth are disposed to make concessions, it is uniformly found, that there is less of gratitude for what is yielded, than of discontent at what is withheld. Every concession serves but to open the way to new demands. The work is hopeless and endless. Shrewd and calculating Unitarians are looking on the recent experiment with deep attention and interest. They perceive that much has been conceded. But they demand

much more. Indeed, they *expect* much more. They argue, and with no little plausibility, that much more *must* and *will* be conceded.

While, then, I impeach not the motives of those who support the theory in question, and while I unfeignedly lament their error, it is both natural and allowable that I should glance at some of the tendencies of the theory itself.

It affords countenance and strength, I cannot but apprehend, to infidelity itself. For more than seventeen centuries, the world has been blessed with the Bible. It addresses us on subjects of everlasting moment. It claims to speak a language which all may understand. But according to the theory in view, its language has *not* been understood. More than this, even on the fundamental points of religion, it has been, by the great mass of readers, egregiously misunderstood and misconstrued. "Can such a book," asks the infidel, "be from the Father of lights—a book which, century after century, has been pouring, not light, but darkness on the human mind—a book which has not only failed of its design, but accomplished the direct reverse?"—The objection is plausible, at least, and not easily answered.

It is an evil reserved for our day, that even on the fundamental points of religion, ceaseless and acrimorous debates should arise among those who claim to be evangelical Christians. Modes of interpretation, and systems of theology, both leading to the most opposite results, are alternately defended and assailed. The church becomes an *arena* of unholy strife. Christians and Christian ministers, ranged into parties, direct against each other that opposition which should have been concentrated against the common foe. What cause of self-congratulation and triumph does this afford to sceptics and infidels. "You call us," say they to Christians, "to agree with you, but with *whom* shall we agree? You call us to believe; but *what* shall we believe? We find that doctrines which, twenty years since, were considered as undisputable, are now, not only disputed, but denounced. And how do we know that the doctrines which have taken their place, may not, in half another twenty years, share the same fate?"—Here is another imposing difficulty. For who can expect that the scepticism and infidelity of the world shall cease, while another species of scepticism and infidelity finds a place within the church?

The theory in view, while it tends to strengthen the infidel, tends not less to confirm many of the irreligious in their impen-

itence. And here, no doubt, I shall be charged with an egregious mistake. "Does not this theory," it will be asked, "powerfully urge the sinner to action? Does it not strip him of the old plea of inability? Does it not rouse him from the torpor of despondence? Does it not, by promising him success, furnish irresistible motives to exertion? And is it not a fact, that it has roused thousands of our countrymen to religion, who, under the former methods of instruction, treated it with entire neglect?"

To these questions, there is an obvious reply. Men will never be *truly in earnest* about religion, till they deeply realize their own depravity. Till the maladies of the heart are seen and felt, the divine Physician will be neither prized nor sought. Superficial views of sin produce nothing but superficial conviction. False views of sin do but deepen and protract the fatal slumber of the soul. Never does the sinner welcome and embrace the Saviour, till, convinced of his guilt, and ruin, and helplessness, he is reduced to a species of *self-despair*.

Such are the *principles* which belong to the case. And now what are the *facts*?

For years, there has prevailed, in various regions of our country, a species of preaching which has dealt little with the difficulties of religion, little with the depravity of the heart, little with the sinner's absolute dependence on the sovereign mercy of God. He has been urged to repentance by arguments derived principally from the extreme facility of the work, from the competency of his own powers, and the certainty of success. Such instructions have produced marked effects on great numbers, who may be distributed into various classes.

The first class is that of those who have gone about the work with some earnestness, and with greater confidence; have diligently employed means, and taken some real pains with their own hearts. But in those hearts, unsuspected reluctances, unconquerable aversions were soon manifest. The unpleasant, hopeless work was abandoned; and the unhappy beings, disgusted with themselves, and disgusted, perhaps, with their spiritual guides, sunk into a kind of *sullen despondence*, from which no ordinary means may be expected to rouse them.

A second class, delighted with the new views given, of the facility of the work, and the sufficiency of their own power to accomplish it, have found in these views an effectual shield, both from conviction and alarm. Under this delusion, they have coolly resolved to defer the unpleasant, easy affair of religion to

a more *convenient season*; a season which never has arrived, and with thousands never will.

With a third class, the new mode of instruction has been *apparently* more successful. Since religion has been promised to their efforts, they have been determined not to fail for want of them. In their way, they have been animated, diligent and persevering. The result of all has been a religion of their own making—a religion which quiets conscience, and banishes fear—but which has in it no true love to God, no genuine repentance, no faith that sanctifies and saves.

But is there not, it may be inquired, a fourth class? I verily believe there is. The instruction to which I have alluded, though chargeable with essential defects and errors, has, by its very novelty, excited attention. Attention has led to inquiry; and doubtless, in multitudes of instances, to serious, anxious, faithful inquiry. The inquirers have sought instruction from the word of God, and from the Spirit of God. And what they sought, they found. Thus by the wonderful mercy of Him whose prerogative it is to elicit light from darkness, and to *bring the blind by a way which they knew not*, they have been safely and effectually guided to Christ, and to a life of piety.

Still, it cannot be denied that this new species of instruction is, in itself considered, a source of infinite peril to the souls of men, and a dire calamity to the church. It would be preposterous indeed to believe that *ordinarily* the preaching of error will prove so much as the *occasion* of leading men into truth; or that there will be found a better religion in the pew, than is inculcated from the pulpit.

My last objection, then, to the new theory is, that it tends to fill the church with a superficial and false religion. It is readily admitted that the religion in view is often splendid, active and imposing. But what does it do for the *heart*? What triumph does it achieve over its depraved and hateful propensities?

It does but skin and film the ulcerous place,
While rank infection, mining all within,
Infects unseen.

I would by no means overlook the exuberant goodness of God to his American churches. I doubt not that He has gathered into them, of recent time, great numbers who shine as lights in the world, and who will shine with the lustre of stars in other worlds. But are there not sad mixtures? Is not the *gold* in

many, many instances, *become dim*? Is there not, in many Christian professors, an evident want of a deep, pervading, controlling spirit of piety? Are they not grossly deficient in the lovely virtues of spirituality, humility, meekness and mutual love? Is there not within the church, a spirit of ambition, pride, vanity and worldliness, which threatens to consume the very vitals of religion? Are not many professors, instead of stemming the torrent of fashionable frivolity and dissipation, too evidently carried away with it?

I have no pleasure in thus lifting the veil. Indeed, I have expressed nothing not too well known before. 'The animadversions uttered are but the echo of the language of thousands. It remains to inquire: May not the evils in view be traced, in part at least, to an altered style of public religious instruction? May not the depressed standard of living be traced, in part, to a depressed standard of preaching? It is a grand Christian maxim, that the truth, and the truth alone, sanctifies. Nor is any fact better ascertained, than that wherever the gospel is in any measure adulterated, it loses just so much of its power to purify individuals, and to purify the community. Especially, if, as I think has been shown, the system in view fails to strike an effectual and fatal blow at the root of human *pride*, the defect is radical; is vital. Human corruption, strong in its intrenchments, will deride and defeat every attempt to expel it from the citadel of the heart.—But the subject is too painful to be pursued; and here I leave it.

I cannot, however, conclude, without adverting to one point in your Essay, which has not yet been touched. You seem to apprehend that the great evil in the church, at this day, is an intolerance of error; an extreme sensitiveness to every departure from truth. But others are of a different opinion. They think that a "wide-spread and increasing indifference to sound doctrine is the present great sin of the Christian church." And you yourself, I think, will not be backward to admit that "there can be no surer sign of degeneracy than the *peaceable progress of error*." For myself, I have no disposition to defend any arbitrary methods of suppressing heresy. It is the *truth* which, in this case, is the sufferer. Yet if there is not, in this age, an unusual and alarming insensibility to the progress of error, and to the duty of opposing it; if many Christians have not too much forgotten their obligation to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints," then am I utterly unacquainted with the signs of the times.

Suffer me to add, that to me it appears not only unjust, but preposterous, that those should be stigmatized with the odious character of *beligerents*, who are acting purely on the defensive, and simply wishing to maintain what they believe, and what the church has ever believed, the grand and vital truths of the gospel; and that those should claim to be the exclusive friends of *peace*, who are directing against these precious doctrines, an incessant and uncompromising hostility.

In view of the existing state of things, it is impossible adequately to describe the importance of our *Theological Seminaries*. From the very nature of the case, they must possess and wield an immense power, either for good or for evil. While they are faithful to GOD, and to HIS TRUTH, the church will not fail to cherish them as her choicest hope, her richest, dearest treasure. But what if they should prove recreant to their high destination? What if the streams which issue periodically from these fountains, should become impure and polluting? Alas, words cannot paint the bitter disappointment, the deep-felt grief, the disastrous, wide-spread, and almost interminable evils which must ensue.

I have thus, my dear Sir, given utterance to some of the many thoughts occasioned by the perusal of your Essay on Sin. If these letters are pervaded by a style of plainness and freedom which may seem not quite congenial to your character and station, my apology must be found in the deeply interesting nature of the subject, and the imperious demands of truth. Nor has it escaped me, that I address one who obviously holds the freest expression of thoughts and feelings to be no crime. Never did I more sincerely deprecate a beligerent spirit in the church, than at the present moment. Never did I cherish a more ardent desire to live in peace with all who love the Redeemer and his cause. But peace itself, if purchased at the expense of essential truth, is too dearly bought.

Humbly commending what I have written to your candor, and that of the Christian public, and above all, to the patronage and blessing of the GREAT HEAD OF THE CHURCH, I subscribe myself,

Very affectionately and sincerely, your friend and brother,

DANIEL DANA.

Newburyport, August 20, 1839.

THE REV. PROFESSOR STUART.

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